

VZCZCXRO9710
PP RUEHDE
DE RUEHRH #5082/01 1760836
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 250836Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8961
INFO RUEHXXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 7364
RUEHRH/CHUSMTM RIYADH SA PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHRMAKS/COMUSNAVCENT PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEORYQ/OPM-SANG RIYADH SA PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 RIYADH 005082

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2016
TAGS: [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [PARM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#)
SA
SUBJECT: U/S EDELMAN'S MEETING WITH ASST MINISTER OF
DEFENSE PRINCE KHALID BIN SULTAN

Classified By: Ambassador James C. Oberwetter for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman discussed the U.S.-Saudi defense relationship, Iran, and regional security during his June 6 meeting with Prince Khalid bin Sultan, Assistant Minister of Defense and Aviation for Security Affairs. The overall tone of the meeting was very up-beat and Prince Khalid praised the US-Saudi mil-to-mil relationship. However, Prince Khalid did raise three main concerns: Saudi Arabia's lack of an early warning air defense data-link; frustrations over obtaining visas for official travel to the U.S.; and Congressional reluctance to release certain equipment to Saudi Arabia. Specifically, he singled out Congress' unwillingness to release Radar Vision 2i, a motion detection device that he sees as crucial for army and navy special forces. He was generally supportive of the U.S. approach toward Iran, but cautioned that gaining support from the Saudi public will be difficult unless a statement is made on Israel's nuclear activities. End Summary.

¶2. (S) During their June 6 meeting, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman and Prince Khalid bin Sultan, Assistant Minister of Defense and Aviation (MODA) for Security Affairs, discussed the U.S.-Saudi security relationship, regional security, helicopters, Iran, Iraq, and visas. Ambassador Oberwetter, Michael Coulter (DAS for PolMil Affairs), Lt Gen Jeffrey Kohler (Director, DSCA), RADM Robert Moeller (CENTCOM J-5), BG Michael Jones (Joint Staff J-5 Deputy Director for PolMil Affairs), Maj Gen Twitchell (CH-USMTM), DATT, and PolMilOff (notetaker) also attended the meeting, as did approximately 10 senior officers from MODA and the Saudi armed forces.

U.S.-SAUDI MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

¶3. (S) Prince Khalid praised the U.S.-Saudi friendship, and said that our cooperative efforts to liberate Kuwait in 1991 "proved to the world the strong alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia." He said that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have the same national interests, including justice, respect for individuals, respect for other countries, and

world peace. He added that we have moved beyond our differences since September 11, "and we now have the best military relationship ever." He said that Saudi Arabia "is committed to our strong relationship, and a strong ally needs a strong defense." Prince Khalid thanked U/S Edelman for the successful recent visit of a USAF delegation, and said he looks forward to the upcoming visit of 68 USAF personnel to conduct a comprehensive review of the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF). He is also optimistic that the Strategic Joint Planning Committee (SJPC) will re-start this year. He added that the Military Joint Planning Committee (MJPC), to be held in September, will help to prepare for the SJPC.

¶4. (S) U/S Edelman said that President Bush and VP Cheney are committed to the U.S.-Saudi relationship, and that the USG intends to conduct regular, senior-level consultations with the SAG, including through interagency delegations. He said that both the SJPC and the MJPC could be used to help develop strategic plans for the region. He added that the USAF plans to present its report on its review of the RSAF in September.

IRAN

¶5. (S) U/S Edelman reiterated Secretary Rice's May 31 statement on Iran, and said that constant new developments in the region require constant consultations with our allies. He said that Iran presents a strategic challenge to the U.S. and to the region, and that we need to work with our allies to develop a strategic response.

RIYADH 00005082 002 OF 004

¶6. (S) Prince Khalid said that any nuclear development in the region is dangerous, and he expressed his hope that the Iranian nuclear standoff would be resolved peacefully, in a way that "saves face" for Iran. He said that dismantling Iran's nuclear program by force would be "the worst scenario" and should be avoided "by any means." He fears that using military force against Iran's nuclear facilities would result in a war more vicious and more violent than the 1991 Gulf War. He added, "I thank God that the U.S. is the world leader, and I pray to God that if there is to be only one nuclear power, that it's the U.S., because the U.S. stands for justice and is responsible with its power."

¶7. (S) Prince Khalid said that Iran's nuclear efforts need to be the focus of the international community, but he stressed that the world cannot simultaneously ignore Israel's nuclear programs. He countered the argument that Israel, unlike Iran, is not a member of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty by asking, "does Israel have the right to develop nuclear weapons, just because it never signed the treaty?" He said that he does not expect Israel to disarm, but he suggested that even a USG statement recognizing Israel's nuclear capability would help gain public Saudi support for our policies on Iran. He said he would like to see Israel give its assurances to renounce nuclear weapons if the entire region, including India and Pakistan, were free of nuclear weapons. He said that convincing the Saudi public that Iran does not have the right to develop nuclear weapons will continue to be difficult as long as Israel is ignored.

¶8. (S) U/S Edelman said that the USG was grateful that the SAG sent a representative to observe the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) exercise held in Turkey in May. He noted that the U.S. and Saudi navies conduct joint exercises, and that there is no reason why such exercises could not take place as part of PSI.

PROBLEMATIC ISSUES

Early Warning Data-Link

19. (S) While striking an overall upbeat tone about the U.S.-Saudi military relationship, Prince Khalid raised several problematic issues that the SAG has consistently voiced: the lack of an early warning air defense data-link; difficulties obtaining visas for official travel to the U.S.; and Congressional resistance to releasing certain equipment to the Kingdom. Prince Khalid said that giving Kuwait, but not Saudi Arabia, the early warning data-link "is a big insult." He said that he cannot explain to his officers why Saudi Arabia does not have the link, and that he has been trying to resolve this issue for the past two years. He added that Saudi Arabia must be able to protect itself from ballistic missiles, saying, "It won't be the Iranian Air Force, or Navy. It won't be ships or boats. It will be missiles."

110. (S) RADM Moeller said that there is only one issue that needs to be resolved before the CISMOA is finalized. He said that he will return to Saudi Arabia the following week, and hopes to complete the agreement soon.

111. (S) Prince Khalid insisted that an agreement to support the broader cooperative defense effort "should be kept simple. Otherwise, if we add other countries, it won't happen at all. All we need to do is adopt the same agreement we had in 1991. I signed that agreement with General Schwarzkopf. We just need to implement it." He continued, "if the USG had listened to us four years ago, we would have the system by now." Prince Khalid said that he welcomes U.S. experts to work on the problem, "but it is urgent -- we should not wait until September to discuss it." Maj Gen Twitchell presented Prince Khalid a letter and point paper outlining the historical background and solution to obtaining shared early-warning. It was suggested that MODA, CENTCOM and USMTM meet as soon as possible to discuss.

RIYADH 00005082 003 OF 004

Visas

112. (S) Turning to the visa issue, Prince Khalid said that a MODA Air Defense Committee plans to travel to the U.S. soon, but the Air Defense Forces G-3, who is their number three official, has not yet been issued a visa. Prince Khalid insisted that the Committee will not go to the U.S. without the G-3. "Please let me know why he cannot get a visa. If he is a terrorist, I will take care of it. But I know how loyal and committed my officers are," he pleaded. U/S Edelman acknowledged Prince Khalid's frustrations and said that Secretaries Rice, Rumsfeld, and Chertoff are all personally engaged in fixing the system to strike a better balance between security and access.

Releasability

113. (S) Prince Khalid raised the SAG's increasing frustrations with Congress' unwillingness to release certain weapons systems and other equipment to Saudi Arabia. He cited Executive Branch advice to MODA to buy certain weapons, only to have Congress deny the sales. "As an example, the U.S. insisted that MODA buys Stingers, and we agreed to pay cash. But Congress said no. It was the same thing with AWACS," he said. He also voiced his displeasure with Congressional objection to RSAF basing its F-15 fighter planes in Tabuk, near Israel, but he was grateful that issue was resolved before OIF. He said that he would prefer that the USG would not even discuss arms sales with the SAG until Congress approves the potential deals. "It's not like the '70s. The Saudi public read the news and has access to the internet and satellite TV. We cannot accept being insulted for buying and paying for weapons that we never receive," he said. Citing MODA's successful purchase of the Hawk and Patriot missiles, Prince Khalid said, "I insisted that we would not discuss those deals with the company until it was

approved in Congress. And it worked."

¶14. (S) U/S Edelman said that the USG will "do what it can" on the releasability issue, and noted that the SJPC will be very important. He added that Congress is becoming more focused on the strategic aspects of the region, particularly in relation to Iran. He added that private companies are different than the USG and that the defense industry should continue to work directly with Congress.

¶15. (S) Mr. Coulter added that he and Lt Gen Kohler work with Congress on arms sales, and said "there is a new environment on the Hill." Rather than using a "piecemeal approach," he said the Executive Branch is starting to engage in a "more holistic, principled" discussion with the Hill about creating regional partnerships for regional security, and "Iran weighs heavy" in the discussions. He said that he believes there is an opportunity now to engage Congress with a different vision for the region. Lt Gen Kohler added that he and Mr. Coulter are working with Congress to move forward on authorizing upgrades to Saudi Arabia's Apaches, Blackhawks, and M1A2 tanks. Prince Khalid said that he is "more concerned about weapons for RSAF," and he suggested a lease-to-sale agreement, similar to what was done four years ago, prior to OEF and OIF.

¶16. (S) Prince Khalid said that MODA's priority is to fight terrorists, and over the past three years, MODA has increased training, equipment, and soldiers in the Special Forces. He specified electronic reconnaissance equipment that the Special Forces units in both the Royal Saudi Land Forces and the Royal Saudi Naval Forces urgently need: Radar Vision 2-I, which allows soldiers to detect personnel through walls and other barriers. He clearly stated, "we are going to buy it from another country if we can't get it from the U.S. We are not going to waste our time waiting for Congress."

¶17. (S) U/S Edelman said that he would look into this, and added that he is committed to improving the interagency process to at least get the Executive Branch all on the same page.

RIYADH 00005082 004 OF 004

¶18. (S) Comment: Prince Khalid tends to be frank and direct in raising his concerns with the USG. His frustrations over releasability, the early warning data-link, and visas are not new, and he will likely continue raising these issues until they have been satisfactorily resolved. Likewise, he consistently raises Israel in reference to Iran's nuclear programs. While he and the rest of the senior SAG leadership are clearly concerned about Iran's nuclear ambitions, the SAG is reluctant to publicly support our stance given Saudi perceptions of Israel's nuclear activities. Finally, Prince Khalid invited U/S Edelman, as he has invited other official visitors, to stay longer, in order to experience Saudi hospitality. End Comment.

¶19. (U) U/S Edelman and Mr. Coulter cleared this cable.
OBERWETTER